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*THE RELATION OF PLATO TO OUR AGE AND  
TO THE AGES*

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A few great books, for those who know them well, make unnecessary a countless number of lesser books. From the higher point of view, all can be seen that is visible from the lower, and much more. To have carefully studied the works of one of the world's great men is to have immensely widened one's own life. To comprehend the scope of his thought and the variety and extent of his sympathies is to have an essential element of a liberal education. An enthusiastic and indiscriminating discipleship, at least at first, is not to be deplored, for a realization of the limitations of great men and the incompleteness of all systems is sure to come later; but no one understands any view of the world who has never been able to feel its plausibility. There is no delight in life like the companionship of a noble mind. A long comradeship with a great man, one in whom intellectual power, ethical elevation, all-inclusive sympathies, and wholeness and wholeness of view are united, is one of the greatest of our human privileges. To it we turn for consolation in our sorrows, for a refuge from the petty irritations and vexations that so constantly beset us, and for help to rise above them to serenity and peace. Through these great souls we are able in some measure to realize the Emersonian ideal of a life of activity and at the same time of poise and power, the hands being in the world of action while the head is above the storm. No service is more real or precious than that which such men have rendered to humanity. By living on the higher planes, they appeal to our latent instincts; they help us to understand our own best selves, and to be what without them we could never be.

Of those who have served our race in this way one of the greatest is Plato. To speak of his mind, of its sweep and power, so

vast and with such insight that, as Lutoslawski well says, he summed up all that went before him and anticipated most of what has come after him, is happily unnecessary. His name is almost synonymous with intelligence. But, more than any of his successors, he is able to minister to one of our peculiar needs. He saw life sanely, and he saw it whole. This wholeness of view is something that, in the increasing complexity of life, the division of labor, the growth of knowledge and the specialization of research, we are constantly in danger of losing. And because we do so often lose it we ourselves become lost in the wilderness of the civilized world. Of course, it was easier for Plato than it is for us. The sum total of science, of philosophical and historical knowledge, in his time was so limited that it was possible for a mind of his order to master it all. He saw everything in relation to everything else. His was pre-eminently the synoptic mind. We feel, as we read his pages, that he is thinking in the light of all the great human interests and forgetting none. For this reason he is one of the wisest of men. Despite the archaisms and the elements that are peculiarly Greek, which make us aware that he lived in the fourth century before Christ, he still impresses us as one of the most universal and human of men. He did, indeed, belong to his age, but still more is he a citizen and contemporary of all ages.

Marvellous as were his intellectual powers, he was equally great in his life. In him the moral and religious interests were supreme. A consummate artist himself, a master, almost a magician, in literary art, the soul of beauty-worshipping Greece incarnate in him, his judgments of the epic and dramatic poetry and the music of his day had almost a Puritan harshness. There is even a suggestion of the attitude of Tolstoy. This is simply the consequence of the strength of his moral sentiment. The great question, he tells us in the *Republic*, is whether we shall be good or bad. To this all else is subordinate—art, literature, industry and politics, everything in public and private life. Surpassingly great thinkers as he and Aristotle both were, they are nevertheless to be regarded as primarily spokesmen of the moral consciousness, and their philosophy—for it is substantially one—is a moral philosophy. Their books are our moral classics. When

asked recently to name some books that would be useful to American citizens who desire to rear their children wisely and well, I was somewhat startled to find that I was placing Plato's *Dialogues* and Aristotle's *Ethics* among the first on the list. To be sure, these wonderful writings need to be supplemented, but they have given classic statement to some of the most essential elements in our composite moral ideal. It was some comfort in this situation to remember that President Eliot once said that Plato's statement of the theory of education has never been surpassed. One is tempted to quote many passages to confirm this estimate of the value of Plato's moral teaching. Consider, for example, the following page from the *Republic*:

But shall our superintendence go no further, and are the poets only to be required by us to express the image of the good in their works, on pain, if they do anything else, of expulsion from our State? Or is the same control to be extended to other artists, and are they also to be prohibited from exhibiting the opposite forms of vice and intemperance and meanness and indecency in sculpture and building and the other creative arts; and is he who cannot conform to this rule of ours to be prevented from practising his art in our State, lest the taste of our citizens be corrupted by him? We would not have our guardians grow up amid images of moral deformity, as in some noxious pasture, and there browse and feed upon many a baneful herb and flower day by day, little by little, until they silently gather a festering mass of corruption in their own soul. Let our artists rather be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and graceful; then will our youth dwell in a land of health, amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in everything; and beauty, the effluence of fair works, shall flow into the eye and ear like a health-giving breeze from a purer region, and insensibly draw the soul from the earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty of reason.

There can be no nobler training than that, he replied.

And therefore, I said, Glaucon, musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten, imparting grace, and making the soul of him who is rightly educated graceful, or of him who is ill-educated ungraceful; and also because he who has received this true education of the inner being will most shrewdly perceive omissions or faults in art and nature, and with a true taste, while he praises and rejoices over and receives into his soul the good, and becomes noble and good, he will justly

blame and hate the bad, now in the days of his youth, even before he is able to know the reason why; and when reason comes he will recognize and salute the friend with whom his education has made him long familiar.

We have here a perfectly clear and adequate presentation of certain fundamental principles that we must observe in the moral education of our children, and that the public must somehow apply in such living questions as the censorship of art, the supervision of moving-picture shows, and other forms of commercial amusement. Aristotle states the rule more tersely thus: The young must be so educated that the good will seem natural and the bad strange. President G. S. Hall only puts the same truth in a different way when he says:

The will especially is a trust we are to administer for the child, not as he may now wish, but as he will wish when more mature. We must now compel what he will later wish to compel himself to do. To find his habits already formed to the same laws that his mature will and the world later enjoin cements the strongest of all bonds between mentor and child. . . . Everything in conduct should be mechanized as early and completely as possible. The child's notion of what is right is what is habitual, and the simple, to which all else is reduced in thought, is identified with the familiar. It is this primitive stratum of habits which principally determines our deepest beliefs—which all must have over and above knowledge—to which men revert in mature years from youthful vagaries.

Plato's writings are among the very best material for moral education, for the reason that in them the highest thought is blended with the noblest emotion. Many of our ethical works are the expressions merely of the critical faculty. All feeling, all enthusiasm, is carefully avoided. If you have a moral life, such a book as Sidgwick's, for example, may help you to understand it. But although it is a treatise on ethics, it is not ethical in the sense of stimulating and strengthening the nobler nature, and is not meant to be. Such works as this have their value, even though it be small. The reader of Plato, on the other hand, not only is instructed, but he feels the contagion of the philosopher's enthusiasms for truth, beauty, and goodness. He realizes that in his own experience he is verifying the principle on which

Plato lays so much stress, that he who associates with good men is transformed into their likeness, and that good men who worship the ideal become like unto God, while the greatest penalty of wrong-doing is that one is thrown into the company of evil men and is inevitably conformed to their image. In the Platonic Dialogues there is neither pure ethical theorizing, which can make no man better, nor exhortation, which is equally futile and is usually and rightfully resented, nor the two together, which is not any more effective. What we have is the expression of a great life which is wholly present in all that it does. The intelligence is not the less vigorous and clear because it works in the atmosphere of moral and aesthetic enthusiasms and of religious faith in the Idea of Good as the source of all things. We have yet to learn that our separation of the functions of life is justifiable only when it is merely provisional and temporary, and that we mutilate ourselves unless we can recombine them in the unity of a concrete life and be whole and human once more. Even logic, which seems necessarily abstract, can, in my opinion, best be taught by more concrete methods. What a magnificent intellectual discipline, for instance, it would be for young men and women to read Plato's Republic critically, to follow the course of the argument in the various books with the object of determining its validity and cogency, and of seeing just where and in what respects it breaks down, and how it would have to be restated or modified or supplemented in order to be logically acceptable! But the moral influence of this book is still greater, especially if read in the impressionable years of early manhood and womanhood, when the mind is still forming and noble enthusiasms have not been rendered impossible by a too intimate acquaintance with the men and the literature of the cynical spirit. For these wonderful pages express not only great thoughts but a passionate love for the supreme human ideal, namely, that of a richly endowed nature brought to its highest perfection by education and using all its powers in the service of society.

To be sure, superficial readers will probably miss this fact; but then superficial readers of great books never derive much profit from their activity. They find that Plato's ideal is a philosopher, and since this term today suggests an epistemologist,

or logician, or a dealer in unintelligibilities about the Absolute, they suppose that this is what the Republic would have us all to be. Whereas what Plato means by the philosophic nature is, as Nettleship so well says, "simply the ideally good nature; human nature completely gifted and with free play given to all its gifts. The philosophic element in man is the essentially human element; it is what makes a man a man, and therefore in its fulness implies a perfect humanity." It is that in us which is akin to the divine, which is of the same nature as the truth we seek, as the ideal we worship.

Plato lays great stress on the first syllable of the word "philosopher." There are, he says, those who have ambitions, who love place and fame; others care more for wealth; some like to use their hands, and some are seekers after new sensations. Man is fundamentally and always a lover. The philosopher is no exception: he is a "lover of the vision of truth." He is dominated by the impulse to understand and be at one with the world, and his chief characteristic is a divine love and longing which will carry him to the utmost development possible to man. He becomes, in Emerson's phrase, "a lover of the uncontained and immortal beauty." Thus, as one of Plato's best interpreters remarks, we have here the Greek analogue of the New Testament conception of the charity, or love, which is the central source and vivifying power in all the virtues, that which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." "In this conception of philosophy there are combined the scientific spirit and the religious spirit in their highest forms. It is the desire to be at one with the laws of nature, and to live according to nature; and as to Plato the world is emphatically the work of a divine intelligence, being at one with nature is also in a sense being at one with God. This is why he speaks of such understanding in terms which we should apply to religious emotion."

This ideal union of the highest intellectual activity with the spirit of worship is perhaps best expressed in those two pages of the Symposium which sketch the normal course of love from its humble beginnings of attraction to the individual and physical to the perception and adoration of that which is beautiful in all beauty, good in all goodness, and true in all truth. It is sad to

think how this passage has been misunderstood, and what perverted meanings are given to the term "Platonic love." For, however curious the language may be, what Plato is attempting to describe, or rather to indicate, is the moral experience of all lives that attain to a high stage of development. Love, in its beginnings, is desperately unideal and matter-of-fact. There seems to be no romance in the sex-attraction of animals and savages. In higher stages of evolution, men realize in experience the capacity of love for transformation and spiritualization. Countless husbands and wives have found their natural affection deepening and being sublimated until it becomes a divine radiance shed over the whole of life. That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; nevertheless there is some spiritual from the beginning and some natural to the end. From idol to ideal—this is the distance we traverse in the development of love. We have only to keep love growing to find at last that it is transformed into worship. All the actual beauty we see in the lives about us becomes a hint of the perfect beauty, and the good in those who are dearest to us is a suggestion, or partial revelation, of the ideal goodness which alone we can adore. And not only do we come in time to realize what it is that we admire and love in one another and are inspired by in the great and good, but we also sometimes understand—and are kept modest by the thought—that those who love us really love the ideals which they believe us to embody. And we dare not take this love to ourselves, so far as we have not the qualities ascribed to us in the affectionate admiration of our friends.

Nothing can make this truth clear to him whose experience has not prepared him to understand it, and no paraphrase of Plato's wonderful pages can give the glow of the philosopher's enthusiasm for the great idea. He felt deeply that it is not man's destiny to remain absorbed in an individual attachment and entranced by personal beauty; but that, rising above the undiscerning loves of the slave, he should perceive that all beauty is of one family, that "the true order of love is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, thence to fair practices, to fair notions, until at last,



with the eye of the mind, he beholds absolute beauty, simple and divine, in the contemplation of which it is man's highest privilege to live." For Plato, as for Dante, the supreme delight was that blend of thought and emotion on the summit of life, the contemplation of the beatific vision, the worship of the ideal. He saw that our life essentially consists in a struggle for perfection, and that it therefore rests on ideal foundations. The best interpreter of his meaning is not any pedantic commentator, but a life of thought and love. The creator of beautiful things feels that he draws near to reality in proportion as he succeeds in portraying the ideal of loveliness; the seeker for truth is convinced that his mind perceives the real in so far as it thinks the true; and to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness everything is unreal compared to that toward which they strive. Always do the active imagination, the growing mind, and the pure and loving heart, see God, and in the worship of that ideal of perfect beauty, righteousness, and love, find their true life.

In Plato it is the whole man that philosophizes. This is one of the great sources of his power. His aesthetic, moral, social, and religious interests, and his passionate intellectual ardor do not impair his critical faculties. Indeed, one is most critical in the things that one loves. And the fact that he is so well balanced, and that every question is examined in the light of all the great human interests, saves him from the mistakes of doctrinaires. He does make mistakes, but he has too vivid a sense of the enormous number of impulses, instincts, needs, and longings in our nature to commit the folly of erecting a theory on such an abstraction as the idea of an "economic man," or that cold calculator of pleasures and pains which some have had in mind when constructing ethical systems and interpretations of history.

It is perfectly true that in strictly scientific investigation we must denude ourselves of all interests except that of discovering facts and laws; but when we are dealing with human life a complete endowment of healthy instincts is as necessary as intellectual clearness and power. Plato succeeded in the main thing. His was a nature as harmonious as it was rich and complete. He closely approximated his own dream of perfection, namely, health of soul. His ideal is, therefore, wholesome, and all the ages may

safely follow. Where he failed was in the means he sometimes recommended for its realization, as in his proposals in regard to family life. But even here, it must be remembered, only the small governing class was to be subject to arbitrary regulation, the mass of the people presumably being left to the customs which have the approval of centuries. Furthermore, the family life which he knew and was willing to surrender for the good of the state was not that which Christian ideals and Teutonic chivalry have combined to produce, but something far less noble and beautiful.

One of Plato's greatest services to his age and to the ages is through the conception he has given us of the good life. He regards the moral life as a problem in organization, which it essentially and normally is, and not as a fight, which badly born and unhappily situated natures find it to be for themselves, and which, generalizing from their own case, they suppose it must be for all. For Plato, the good life is the life that is set in order. There is a natural scale of values for all the many instincts, impulses, needs, tendencies, desires, and aspirations of human nature. None of these is bad, when in its subordinate and proper place. All are good when functioning normally in an organized life. The highest in man is reason, intelligence, together with the corresponding desire to use this power. Next is a group of nobler emotions, for which in English we have no adequate collective term. It includes that which makes men worthily ambitious, which gives them a sense of honor, and makes them capable of moral indignation at injustice and wrong. Lower still is a heterogeneous mass of desires, all useful and indispensable, but difficult to control, and frequently strong enough to throw the whole nature into disorder. These are the raw materials of the moral life. Our supreme task is to organize them, not out of enmity to any, but from regard to all. The ideal is *fulness of life through order*. When the hierarchy of impulse has been established, and the life, so to speak, has been graded, the result is such happiness as is possible to our nature. It is health of soul. This is the answer to the great question which Glaucon and Adeimantus put to Socrates at the beginning of the Second Book of the Republic. We want to know, they say in substance, what the good life essentially is.

Please do not tell us about the way it is rewarded in heaven or on earth. Suppose it did not pay in terms of external prosperity, suppose even that it brought suffering, what is the good life in itself? The reply is that the good life is the life which, through education and citizenship in a well-ordered state, is itself set in order, with the highest and divinest in our nature in control and everything else in its appropriate place. After sketching an ideal human career in which the soul rises to the greatest height, he outlines the reverse process of utter ruin through progressive disorganization.

There is one passage in which Plato, concisely and with entire clearness and adequacy, sets forth his conception of the good life, and which I always want to quote in every ethical discussion. He says:

In reality justice was such as we were describing, being concerned, however, not with the outward man, but with the inward, which is the true self and concernment of man: for the just man does not permit the several elements within him to interfere with one another, or any of them to do the work of others; he sets in order his own inner life, and is his own master and his own law, and at peace with himself; and when he has bound together the three principles within him, which may be compared to the higher, lower, and middle notes of the scale, and the intermediate intervals—when he has bound all these together, and is no longer many, but has become one entirely temperate and perfectly adjusted nature, then he proceeds to act, if he has to act, whether in a matter of property, or in the treatment of the body, or in some affair of politics or private business; always thinking and calling that which preserves and co-operates with this harmonious condition, just and good action, and the knowledge which presides over it, wisdom, and that which at any time impairs this condition, he will call unjust action, and the opinion which presides over it ignorance. (Republic, 448, D-E.)

Observe here the apparently parenthetical but important words, "the intermediate intervals." Plato knows that his statement is merely schematic, and that he has not given a complete list of the impulses in our nature which it is our life task to organize. We must, he says, find for each power, or "part," of the soul its proper position in the structure of life.

The social problem is practically the same. He knows that men

differ, and that individuality implies organization. So he aims to utilize the fighting instinct, the artistic instinct, and the powers of the thinkers. His great problem is to prevent the waste of human resources, especially the highest. *Corruptio optimi pessima*. He strives for a form of social organization in which each member should render to society the particular service he could perform best. Each man would then have an organic place in human society. And as the danger to the individual moral life is from insubordinate impulse, so the structure of society is menaced by "the inorganic man."

This way of viewing the moral and social life is not antiquated, but something that we are now growing into and that will be more and more indispensable to our highest development. The comprehending student of our time realizes that one of our most urgent needs is that of a revised conception of goodness. The traditional conception is too narrow, too ascetic, and—I will not say, too Christian, but—too Pauline. The moral life is regarded as a fight between two parts of our nature, the flesh and the spirit; and the ideal, as stated in the letter to the Romans, is not to control the life of impulse but to destroy it. Mortify the deeds of the flesh. The aim is to kill one part of the self, and for the other part to live in mystic union with a divine spirit. Of course, there is something to be said for this view, and for those whose passions are so strong that they are constantly in danger of being swept away by them, it is perhaps the most practicable as well as the most natural view. If one is beset by devils, he must fight for his life. As the gospel says, "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off: for it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell." To be sure, if one is so badly born as that, he has no other resource. But normal, ordinary people have no such difficulties with their eyes or other members as this. In the complexity of modern life, and with so many factors to consider in each concrete case, it is for most people harder to know what is right than, when it is known, to do it. Paul, struggling and praying to be delivered from his "body of death," is exceptional. He is not a type. We may praise him, but we are misled by him if we fall into his way of thinking of the good life as a fight. The Platonic conception of our moral task as consisting essentially, not

in an internecine civil war in our members, but in an intelligent organization of the many elements of our richly endowed nature, is much more rational and wholesome. The ideal life is the abundant life, the abundance being attained through the establishment of inner order. Ideal goodness is simply the amplest expression of human nature.

It is no disloyalty to our Christian inheritance to acknowledge this fact. In the New Testament are teachings that are as the purest gold. That God is best symbolized by such terms as light and love; that evil is to be overcome, not by evil, but by good; that faith, hope, and love are the essential and the ultimate in religion; that we are children of the Perfect—these are truths that humanity must steer by for ages to come. We do not need to give them up when we follow Plato rather than Paul in our ideas of the moral life. All the true things, the beautiful and the good, are compatible, for they are of one family. And the Platonic view is not only truer to the experience of twentieth century Americans than the militant and ascetic view with which we are so familiar, but it is more in accord with the general conception we are coming to have of civilization. The old times, when men had to fight for their lives against savage beasts and still more savage men, are passing. More and more the life of civilized men is actually becoming a vast co-operative, constructive activity. We are being knit together in a tissue of relations of many kinds. Everywhere the call is for builders, not for destroyers; it is for those who can conciliate and direct, for those who can unite and organize men.

There is just one great defect in the Platonic ethics, and that is remediable. The main conception is fundamentally true and is clearly and adequately stated: still it is pre-evolutionary and consequently too static. We have come to think of life in terms of growth. It is a process, and while the elements that enter into it must be organized, the organization cannot be effected once for all. Nothing can be done once for all. Life means adjustments and unceasing readjustments. Since it is a process of development, good is that which promotes development, bad is that which hinders it. These two great ideas, that of organization and that of evolution, are complementary. Taken together, they

round out ethical philosophy. From this point of view, the ideally good life is the life that is set in order, but one whose organization is plastic and capable of constant adjustment in a world whose law is change.

An important corollary is to be noted. If our life task, personal and social, is fundamentally one of organization, then those who think of it as primarily a fight are behind the times. And if life is an evolutionary process, men of revolutionary spirit and methods are anachronisms. Furthermore, it follows that those who are militant revolutionists are doubly wrong, social misfits, reactionary and dangerous. The moral crusader, passionate in his hatreds and seeking to bring the kingdom of God by attacking somebody, belongs to the past. The social life of the future is to be directed by men of a more statesman-like type, men who are constructive in spirit and evolutionary in method.

The main defect of Plato's thought about human life is that it is pre-evolutionary. It is true that in a passage in the *Laws* he remarks that time is the maker of states—time and natural process; that "the change was not made all in a moment, but, little by little, during a very long period of time, the world came to be what the world is." Still, he cherishes the impossible ideal of finding the best institutions and laws and fixing them forever. Moreover, he does not realize, as many do not today, the danger of paternalism; he has not perceived that it is better for men to govern themselves than to be directed by a superior class. They do not manage things so well, but they are educated and developed by the difficulties and responsibilities of self-government. The reader of the *Republic* must, therefore, remember that Plato's description of the evolution of the state and his picture of the progressive disorganization of the state and the analogous process of ruin in the soul are to be taken in a logical rather than in an historical sense. He takes up certain tendencies in human life and shows what they ultimately come to, if unchecked. A New Testament writer practically does the same thing, when he says, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." That is the logical goal of hate, its meaning and its direction from the beginning.

The problem of inculcating reverence in the young is often

treated in the Dialogues, and the discussions have a strangely modern sound. Plato faced the fact that the youth of his time were familiarized from their earliest years with Homer and Hesiod. This is magnificent poetry, which tells stories in the most fascinating way, and is well adapted to shape the admirations of impressionable children. Unfortunately, the stories were not always models of virtuous thoughts, and some of the tales about the gods are objectionable, the result being to confuse the moral judgments of the Greek race.

And since not reverence, but a discriminating reverence, is a prime need, Plato is driven to demand an expurgated scripture and a censorship of fiction. "God and the things of God," he says, "surely are perfect in every way," and the poets are not to be permitted to teach otherwise, for always do men tend to become like that which they worship. And to that question of perennial interest, How shall children be taught reverence for others? Plato gives the one answer that is valid for all time. It is found in a passage in the *Laws* which ought to be graven in the mind of all parents and teachers:

Let parents, then, bequeath to their children not a heap of riches, but the spirit of reverence. We indeed fancy that they will inherit reverence from us, if we rebuke them when they show a want of reverence. But this quality is not really imparted to them by the present style of admonition, which only tells them that the young ought always to be reverential. A sensible legislator will rather exhort the elders to reverence the younger, and above all to take heed that no young man sees or hears one of themselves doing or saying anything disgraceful; for where old men have no shame, there young men will most certainly be devoid of reverence. The best way of training the young is to train yourself at the same time; not to admonish them, but to be always carrying out your own admonitions in practice.

Is it not strange that, although this was said so clearly and forcibly nearly 2,300 years ago, there are still people who imagine that reverence can be taught by precept, that it can be inculcated in children by criticising them for not having it? Would that twentieth-century Americans might learn from Plato that the way to teach reverence is to have it, to respect the personality of

children, to show to their own elders the beautiful deference and courtesy they wish their children to have, and to avoid the cynical and scoffing spirit as they would the plague.

If inspired writings are those which inspire us, the Platonic Dialogues constitute one of the most precious parts of the Bible of our race. They find us in the heights and in the depths of our nature, and appeal to every high instinct in our human endowment. When we feel dull and discouraged, when we have slipped down from the heights on which we wish to live, we have only to open these delightful books to find refreshment of spirit and renewing of mind. There is the *Gorgias*, which distinguishes the pleasant from the good and is a dramatic portrayal of the true and noble art of life. The immoralism of Nietzsche is here clearly stated and refuted 2,200 years before Nietzsche. As we gaze on Plato's idealization of suffering goodness, our hearts leap within us, and we realize once more in our experience the truth which the author of the Fourth Gospel had in mind when he makes his ideal Christ exclaim, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." The moral passion of Plato thrills us as he argues in support of the four great convictions:

1. It is a greater evil to do than to suffer injustice.
2. It is better to suffer for wrong-doing than not to suffer.
3. We do not what we will, but what we wish.
4. To be and not to seem is the end of life.

The *Protagoras*, too, is a nearly perfect work of art, and doubtless contains reminiscences of some of the finest talk on our planet. In it are found the memorable words: "No one punishes the evil-doer under the notion or for the reason that he has done wrong—only the unreasonable fury of a beast acts in that manner. But he who desires to inflict rational punishment does not retaliate for a past wrong which cannot be undone; he has regard to the future, and is desirous that the man who is punished and the man who sees him punished may be deterred from doing wrong again. He punishes for the sake of prevention."

In the *Protagoras* Plato defends his beautiful faith in human nature—a faith which increasing knowledge justifies—that "no man voluntarily pursues evil, or that which he thinks to be evil. To prefer evil to good is not in human nature."



There has never been better preaching in the world, nor any less wearisome. Plato mingles humor and satire with moral earnestness as he expresses his life's exalted and beautiful ideal. Nothing can be more dramatic, for example, than the situations in the *Apology* and *Crito*, when Socrates is made to utter such convictions as these: "No evil can happen to a good man either in life or after death."—"The unexamined life is not worth living."—"Not life, but a good life, is to be chiefly valued."—"We ought not to retaliate or render evil for evil to any one, whatever evil we may have suffered from him."

In the *Phaedo* Plato treats of the problem of immortality. There are many verbal fallacies in it which are natural in the infancy of logic; yet, as Jowett says, "the arguments, taken in the spirit, and not in the letter, are our arguments." But this dialogue is more than a book of philosophy; it is also a work of art, in which scenes of suffering and death are clothed with beauty. A spirit of fine, sweet humanity pervades it, the contagion of which is like a precious perfume. Recall the crisis in the conversation, when the argument which Socrates had builded seemed to be overthrown by the objections of Simmias and Cebes. *Phaedo* remarks that the company was dejected, and for the moment had not only lost confidence in the discredited argument, but despaired of any more trustworthy reasoning in the future. Socrates, seated in the midst of the young men, stroking the head of *Phaedo*, soothed their disappointment, rallied them as a general rallies his defeated troops, and proceeded to rehabilitate the argument. But first he warned them against the danger of generalizing from such an experience. For just as a betrayal of confidence sometimes produces loss of faith in human nature, so the breakdown of an argument sometimes makes them despair of the possibility of knowledge. We must beware, said he, of "becoming misologists: no worse thing can happen to a man than this." This counsel is still needed; and I have never ceased to be grateful to a great Harvard teacher who twenty years ago told me that in my intellectual adventures I need never fear so long as I kept "faith in the worth of human nature and the reality of truth."

There is not, in my opinion, much of value in Pragmatism,

but what there is, as well as the sphere in which it is useful, was indicated in the brave words of Simmias in the *Phaedo*:

I feel myself—and I daresay that you have the same feeling—how hard or rather impossible is the attainment of any certainty about questions such as these in the present life. And yet I should deem him a coward who did not prove what is said about them to the uttermost, or whose heart failed him before he had examined them on every side. For he should persevere until he has achieved one of two things: either he should discover or be taught the truth about them; or, if this be impossible, I would have him take the best and most irrefragable of human theories, and let this be the raft upon which he sails through life—not without risk, as I admit, if he cannot find some word of God which will more surely and safely carry him.

The intellectual enthusiasm of the Greek race, an enthusiasm which Plato and Aristotle are still propagating by contagion in their readers, is naïvely expressed in these sentences from the *Phaedrus*: “There neither is nor ever will be anything more honored in the eyes both of gods and men than the cultivation of the mind,” and “For what should a man live if not for the pleasures of discourse?” Hundreds of these gems, or golden texts, are scattered through these wonderful pages. Even in the *Timaeus*, in which absurdities are mingled with insights, we find the statement that “he who neglects education, walks lame to the end of life, and returns imperfect and good for nothing to the world below.” The *Timaeus* also reaches the conception of the ethical life as under law, as a voluntary taking of one’s place in the order of the universe. Plato’s final conclusions on the great ethical problem of the place of pleasure in life are given in the *Philebus*, the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* marking transitional stages of his thought. What he calls the “loveliest of lives” is, he says, not simple, but a mixture, a blend, first of measure, of beauty, symmetry and truth, then of mind and wisdom, of the sciences and the arts, and finally, in the fifth class, the pure and necessary pleasures, that is, those which accompany temperance and health. The *Philebus* is a solid ethical work, in which a serious attempt is made to find the proper place for the leading interests in life. It is almost modern in its technical

thoroughness and difficulty for the reader, but the ardent lover of the highest things still reveals, here and there, the feeling that accompanies his thought, as when he speaks of "the soul's power and faculty of loving the truth, and of doing all things for the sake of the truth."

The master work is, of course, the *Republic*. To praise it is like complimenting the stars or the moral law. What it is to those who know it best may perhaps be indicated by saying that, if they were to be banished from civilized society and allowed to take with them but one book, they would not hesitate long; they would take the *Republic*. For one of the greatest of earth's children has here discussed the most central of all problems—how to live best, and what is the form of human society in which the best life is possible. Here is a picture of the rise of the human soul through education to its greatest possible heights and of its ruin through progressive disorganization. It is at once philosophy, poetry, and preaching. It is a dramatic writing in which ideas are exhibited alive and growing, and truth is elicited by contact of view with view. His faith in education is as strong as ours, but his ideal is higher than that which most men cherish. He urged athletics that the body might be brought to its perfection; he prescribed music, including literature and the arts, in order that the young might be led to develop a true taste and an overmastering love of the beautiful in all things, not excepting conduct and life; and he considered that the object of scientific study was to produce statesman-like, synoptic minds, growing ever in the love of truth and the power to see the good, the consummate product of education being a life of "reason blended with music."

Plato's thoughts and ideals were no doubt timely in the fourth century before Christ, but they are not less timely in the twentieth century after. Great, rich, prosperous America needs his enthusiasm for the ideal not less than the Athens of his day. What would be the result for our modern society of an acceptance of the ideals of the Greek moral philosophers? Bosanquet, speaking of Aristotle, whose ideals in the large are the same as Plato's, concisely and happily answers:

The habituation of the young and the moral education of society are to be so guided and framed by the statesman that art and learning and religion shall always hold the highest place and so far as humanly possible shall have the lead in, and form the inspiration of, his country. . . . All persons are capable of religion and knowledge, and the tone and worthiness of their life is very different according as they are or are not, in their degree, conscious of an inspiration and an ideal pervading their society. . . . We have to think of the tone of a society in which saintliness and intelligence and science or, again, fine art and poetry, are respected, compared with one in which all things of that kind go to the wall. The two are different, not merely in including a few individuals of different types, but in the whole mind and spirit of every person, right down to the simplest and least fortunate citizens.

This last point is very important. The highest culture ought not to be the exclusive privilege of a few; it is rather the chief means of human happiness. Our democracy does not adequately realize this, but clings to the conviction that a man's life consists in the abundance of things which he possesses. But our human life is primarily social, and our happiness must be largely in one another. And we must learn that it is impossible to derive much happiness from association with lives which have no care for what gives worth to life. Society, in the true sense, is possible only to men and women with ideals. As Bosanquet puts it: "The highest form of human association is that in which human beings have come to care for that in each other which is the best and consequently the most real thing in them, namely, the highest goodness and intelligence. When this is so, the group-consciousness has become the consciousness of a response in the other to what is highest and best in the self. This response is a heightening of life by the extension of the awareness of our life to the life of the friend who shares our consciousness of the best things. We feel our life intensified in his."

One who has not studied Plato, but who has an inaccurate and exaggerated notion of progress, may feel that the readers of these old books are carried away by their enthusiasm, and that what they say of the great teacher cannot be true. But if the critic will read for himself, he will realize that, as Emerson said of the Yosemite Valley, "the facts are up to the brag." The feeling

is natural, however, for those who know Plato best are often astonished at the grasp of his mind and his anticipation of the best thought of today. For example, in the *Charmides*, Socrates remarks that, when a man comes to a physician to be treated for bad eyes, an inquiry is made into his general health. The Greek physicians knew better than to attempt to treat one organ while ignoring the body of which it is an organic part; and the *Phaedrus* quotes a saying of Hippocrates, that "the nature of the body can only be understood as a whole." In the *Charmides* Socrates then continues, "the Greek physicians are quite right as far as they go"; but they should go farther, for "as you ought not to attempt to cure the eyes without the head, or the head without the body, so neither ought you to attempt to cure the body without the soul; and this is the reason why the cure of so many diseases is unknown to the physicians of Hellas, because they are ignorant of the whole, which ought to be studied also; for the part can never be well unless the whole is well." Apropos of the physicians, he remarks that in his day they were ingenious in finding "very strange and new-fangled names for diseases, and had also found out a way of torturing the world, namely, by the invention of lingering death." Indeed, the humor of the philosopher gives life and interest to many of his pages. He can laugh even with those who laugh at the idealist, and reports the jest of the Thracian handmaid about the philosopher Thales who was looking at the stars and fell in a well. She said, "He was so eager to know what was going on in heaven that he could not see what was before his feet." And in the allegory of the cave he makes us realize that it was in Greece as it is with us—the practical politicians ridicule the idealistic struggler for the world's betterment. They smile as he indulges in what they consider impotent talk; for do they not carry the primaries?

All this Plato sees, but he also knows that there is a point of view from which the little, sordid mind is itself ridiculous:

When he [the idealist] draws the other into the upper air, and gets him out of his pleas and rejoinders into the contemplation of justice and injustice in their own nature and in their difference from one another and from all other things; or from the commonplaces about the happiness of a king or of a rich man to the consideration of gov-

ernment and of human happiness and misery in general—what they are, and how a man is to attain the one and avoid the other—when that narrow, keen, little legal mind is called to account about all this, he gives the philosopher his revenge; for dizzied by the height at which he is hanging, whence he looks down into space, which is a strange experience to him, he, being dismayed, and lost, and stammering broken words, is laughed at, not by Thracian handmaidens or any other uneducated persons, for they have no eye for the situation, but by every one who has not been brought up a slave. Such are the two characters: the one of the freeman, who has been trained in liberty and leisure—him we cannot blame because he appears simple and of no account when he has to perform some menial task, such as packing up bed-clothes, or flavoring a sauce or fawning speech; the other character is that of the man who is able to do all this kind of service smartly and neatly, but knows not how to wear his cloak like a gentleman; still less with the music of discourse can he hymn the true life aright which is lived by immortals or men blessed of heaven. (*Theaetetus*, 175.)

Plato's thought and ideals are not dead, but alive still and fertilizing the minds of men. Being the very incarnation of the more permanent aspirations of mankind, of our inborn yearning for perfection, he has in all the ages since he disappeared into the unseen been an uplifting influence on the world's higher life. The theologians and Church Fathers, the great poets, the social idealists, groups of scholars such as the Cambridge Platonists, and practically all significant thinkers of the present time, have been profoundly influenced by Plato directly or through others who have learned from him, and usually in both ways. Open any serious modern work on philosophy, ethics, or religion, and in the index at the end you are almost sure to find a number of references to this great name. Professor J. S. Harrison has shown in his book, "*The Teachers of Emerson*," that Greek thought was the most important factor in Emerson's intellectual development, Plato and the Platonists being the feeding-ground of his mind. This is not a theory, but a demonstration, for "it was Emerson's habit to index his books and to mark the places which held his attention," and, when these marked passages are "studied in the light of his critical attitude toward Platonism, they appear as veritable sources of his thought." We thus learn that the Platonists inspired Emerson as he inspires us, and those who love

both Plato and Emerson love the same thing. We get, thus, a new sense of the fact that the great intellectual and spiritual traditions of civilization are the bread of life for mankind.

The chief difficulty in writing on this subject is to come to an end. There can be no question of adequate treatment of this great philosopher and great man, who has dealt with and illuminated all the main interests of our race from athletics to eugenics and religion. If we must try to sum up in sentence the chief service of Plato to our age and the ages, we perhaps cannot do better than to say that from him and from those whom he has inspired and taught we have best learned to perform our civic and social duties and yet live in the ideal realm, to have our conversation in heaven as we walk the streets of our earthly city.